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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NICOSIA 001754

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SUBJECT: COMMITTEE ON MISSING PERSONS: ANTHROPOLOGICAL LAB
UP AND RUNNING

REF: NICOSIA 926 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald L. Schlicher, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. Ambassador toured the newly-established Committee on Missing Persons anthropological lab in the UN Buffer Zone on October 10 to observe firsthand the progress being made in the identification of Cypriots from both communities who went missing in the 1963-1974 period of civil unrest and war. The USG's 135,000 USD contribution to this ongoing humanitarian undertaking is money well spent; the CMP represents one of the few instances where Greek and Turkish Cypriots are cooperating effectively under a UN umbrella. CMP officials expect that the Committee will soon be able to make positive DNA matches on the 47 victims they have exhumed and catalogued so far, allowing for the return of remains to surviving family members to begin by early 2007. END SUMMARY.

CMP (FINALLY) MAKING PROGRESS

12. (SBU) On October 10, Ambassador and poloffs toured the anthropological lab that was set up in the UN Buffer Zone in April 2006 to support the work of the Tripartite Committee on Missing Persons (CMP). The CMP -- which consists of representatives from the Greek Cypriot community, Turkish Cypriot community, and UN -- is charged with determining the fate of over 1500 Greek Cypriots and over 500 Turkish Cypriots missing since the 1963-1974 period of intercommunal violence and war. Disagreement over its mandate, as well as outright obstructionism by the previous Turkish Cypriot regime, largely paralyzed the CMP until August 2004, when a more flexible Turkish Cypriot approach permitted the work of the Committee to resume in earnest.

13. (C) The parties reached a series of delicate political compromises to defuse, among other things, disagreements over the methodology and location of genetic testing as well as the scope of the CMP's investigation (the Committee uses interviews, documentary research and forensic evidence to locate and identify the remains of the missing persons, but does not seek to determine causes of death or assign blame). These agreements -- as well as financial and in-kind contributions from the U.S., UK, the two communities, Germany, Greece, and Turkey -- allowed the complicated and costly process (estimated by CMP to be over 3 million USD per year) of exhumations to begin in late 2005 (reftels). Although contributions received to date have allowed operations to move forward now, insiders from the Committee tell us they will certainly have to seek additional funds before the end of 2006; they expect it could take at least three more years of work at the current pace for the CMP to complete recovery, identification, and return of all the remains they expect to locate. In addition to worrying about more traditional questions of donor fatigue, CMP members are concerned that disagreements over whether the CMP should receive support from EU funds currently set aside

specifically for Turkish Cypriot economic development could tie up contributions from potentially important donor.

FORENSICS WITH A HUMAN TOUCH: HOW IT WORKS

¶4. (C) According to the CMP's newly-appointed Third (UN) Member Christophe Girod, who briefed the Ambassador during his tour of the anthropological lab, the Committee's work is proceeding with remarkably little political acrimony. The three members meet weekly, said Girod, to exchange information and maps on possible mass graves and to identify which exhumations will take place -- taking care to ensure a rough proportionality between likely Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot burial sites.

¶5. (SBU) Bicommunal teams, supported by forensic and archeology experts from as far afield as Ireland and Argentina, then exhume remains from the priority sites and transfer them to the anthropology lab. At the lab, CMP teams catalogue and (where possible) reassemble skeletal remains and personal effects recovered from grave sites -- correlating "ante mortem" evidence, such as victims' medical records and testimony gathered from surviving relatives, in a comprehensive computer data base to make preliminary identifications. Once the anthropological lab completes its report, a unit currently being established in the Cyprus Institute of Neurology and Genetics (CING) will conduct DNA analysis to confirm the identity of each complete, or fragmentary, set of remains.

¶6. (C) According to Girod, 47 sets of remains have been examined and catalogued by the lab so far, and are ready for genetic testing by CING. 25 more are currently being

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examined at the anthropology lab, and two teams are currently in the field exhuming more remains. Girod expects to finalize CMP's contract negotiations with CING "within a week," which would allow genetic testing to proceed on the initial 47 victims before the end of October -- with final, confirmed DNA identifications by early 2007. (COMMENT: The U.S. contribution of 135,000 USD, drawn from ESF money earmarked for bicommunal projects, is being donated through the UNDP-implemented ACT program and will help defray the costs of genetic testing of remains at CING -- which itself was built and equipped with 10 million USD ESF funding through UNHCR in the 1990s, in order to research health issues common to both communities and treat patients from both sides. END COMMENT.)

¶7. (SBU) Girod's assistant Jennifer Wright noted that the CMP will remain in close contact with survivors' families throughout the identification process, consulting them as preliminary identifications are made, informing them when DNA tests confirm a positive match, and ultimately handing over the remains for viewing and final burial according to the wishes of the survivors.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) The CMP represents one of the few examples of ongoing, pragmatic cooperation between the two Cypriot communities. Such initiatives deserve our continued support, especially when they address matters of urgent humanitarian concern to people on both sides, like the fate of the missing. Our tour of the anthropological lab (where we observed bicommunal teams working together around tables piled high with skulls, personal effects, and bone fragments from long-missing victims) was a dramatic reminder of the human dimension of the Cyprus problem, so often obscured by silly political posturing on both sides. END COMMENT.

SCHLICHER